

Let me finally say that now that we are honoring our commitment to build a 21st century transportation infrastructure, I hope that the bipartisan support I have already seen for a 21st century education infrastructure will result in a broad bipartisan bill there as well. For less than one-tenth of the cost of this bill and without spending a cent of the surplus, we can help to ensure that our children will be able to learn in safe, modern, well-equipped schools.

Now again, for all of you, just look at this array of Members of Congress who are here from both parties and both Houses. This shows what we can do when we bring honorable differences and an honest determination to solve a problem together in open and respectful dialog with an absolute commitment to getting to the end of the road. This kind of constructive bipartisan approach can do anything it sets its mind to do.

I talked to Senator Lott today, and I want to thank him and, in his absence, Senator Daschle, for the agreements which have been made today to allow votes to proceed on the tobacco legislation. I thank you, sir. We have another chance to save a million lives, reduce youth smoking, and make a massive contribution

to the public health of America. The public expects us to work out our differences on this legislation and on other important bills. The public expects us to act as parents, not politicians. The public really expects us to bring the kind of bipartisan spirit that was brought to bear on this transportation bill to all our important work here.

And I must say again, the country owes a deep debt of gratitude to the United States Congress for the way they have done this work. Thank you. And I would like to ask all the Members of Congress to come up here and gather around, and I'll sign the bill.

[At this point, the President signed the bill.]

Thank you all very much. We're adjourned.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:45 p.m. in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Robin McNab, member, Operating Engineers Local 77, Suitland, MD, who introduced the President; Gov. Edward T. Schafer of North Dakota; and Gov. George V. Voinovich of Ohio. H.R. 2400, approved June 9, was assigned Public Law No. 105-178.

Statement on Signing the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century June 9, 1998

Today I am pleased to sign into law H.R. 2400, the "Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century." This comprehensive infrastructure measure for our surface transportation programs—highway, highway safety, and transit—retains the core programs and builds on the initiatives established in the landmark Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991.

This Act achieves our transportation goals while maintaining fiscal discipline. My Administration worked with the conferees to eliminate excessive funding that would have undermined key Administration priorities for the environment, child care, and education. The resulting compromise, which is paid for with real offsets, funds a record level of guaranteed transportation investment while preserving the budget surplus for Social Security first. The Act also includes

a new budget method for surface transportation programs, ensuring that certain transportation authorizations may not be reduced in order to increase spending for nontransportation purposes. I support this change.

I am deeply disappointed, however, that H.R. 2400 fails to include language that would help to establish 0.08 percent blood alcohol concentration (BAC) as the standard for drunk driving in each of the 50 States. The experience of States that have adopted the 0.08 blood alcohol level shows that this stringent measure against drunk driving has the potential, when applied nationwide, to save hundreds of lives each year. Applying 0.08 nationwide is an important cornerstone of our safety efforts. My Administration will continue to fight for it. In the meantime, H.R. 2400 does establish a new \$500

million incentive program encouraging the States to adopt tough 0.08 BAC laws.

I am pleased that H.R. 2400 adopts two complementary programs to further increase seat belt use: (1) a \$500 million incentive program based on the medical cost savings to the Federal Government from increased seat belt use; and (2) an \$83 million program that targets specific State laws and programs to increase seat belt and child safety seat use. The Act also promotes safety by adopting my Administration's proposal to restructure the motor carrier safety program. These provisions will allow the States to invest in areas where they determine the greatest safety payoff can be achieved. The Act strengthens Federal and State enforcement tools, provides innovative approaches to improving motor carrier compliance, and enhances the information systems that support motor carrier safety activities.

The Act also ensures an appropriate balance between highway and transit spending. The share of guaranteed funding allocated to transit will increase from 17 percent this year to 20 percent in 2002. This Act also includes several provisions that are based on Administration proposals. It creates a new grant program to promote greater cooperation among transit, labor, and health services, and assists social services recipients in gaining greater access to jobs and training opportunities. It gives local transit operators the flexibility to use capital funds for preventive maintenance and for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. It helps level the playing field between employer-provided parking benefits and transit/vanpool benefits, giving transit and vanpool benefits comparable treatment to parking benefits provided under the Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997.

This Act represents the only significant environmental legislation enacted thus far during this session of the Congress, and I am very pleased that it supports my environmental and natural resource program priorities. As I requested, the Act increases funding levels for key environmental programs to help communities meet national standards for clean air and support environmental enhancements to our surface transportation system. The Act also provides for a streamlined environmental review process for highway projects. In this regard, my Administration will ensure that the fundamental protections of the National Environmental Policy Act, which include environmental protection, public partici-

pation, and collaborative decisionmaking, are not compromised. The Act also increases funding for roads that serve Federal lands, helping to address construction and maintenance needs for our national parks, forests, refuges, and Tribal lands.

I am also pleased that the Act extends the ethanol tax incentives through 2007. These are commonsense investments that will help protect air quality, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and create new economic opportunity for farmers.

I continue to oppose strongly, however, the use of legislative riders on authorization or appropriation bills to address substantive environmental issues. Unfortunately, in the final hours of conference negotiations, efforts were made to add a variety of provisions that would have undermined environmental protection, and that were never debated or voted on during House or Senate consideration of the bill. Most such provisions were ultimately removed, although certain objectionable riders remain in the bill. For example, one rider could open the way for the use of motorized vehicles for portages in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area wilderness in Minnesota. A second rider provides funding for the consideration of a new transportation route into the heart of the Denali National Park and Preserve in Alaska. I view the addition of these kinds of riders as an abuse of the legislative process. I call on the Congress to renounce this practice in the future and pursue environmental legislation through the regular authorization process with open debate and appropriate public scrutiny.

I am very pleased that H.R. 2400 continues the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Program contained in previous statutes. This program has provided an opportunity for small, disadvantaged businesses to compete in highway and transit contracting undertaken with Federal funding. The Act also continues vital labor protections for America's transportation and construction workers.

The Act establishes a strategic planning process to determine national research and technology priorities and provides substantial funding for new and improved transportation technologies. It protects underground utilities, such as pipelines and fiber-optic cables, that transport critical energy supplies and information necessary to keep America's economy strong.

I am troubled by the many hundreds of special interest highway projects funded in this Act. I would have preferred a “cleaner” bill, with funds provided to States for projects of their choosing. Project selection decisions should be a State responsibility.

I would also have preferred a stronger program to support implementation of a key Federal responsibility—control of our Nation’s borders. My Administration will work with the Congress to secure additional funds, within existing highway funding totals, to ensure that the Government has the technology and infrastructure in place to expedite cross-border traffic while continuing our vital efforts to stop contraband, including illegal drugs, from entering our country.

I am pleased that H.R. 2400 adopts the low student loan interest rate that the Vice President proposed in February on behalf of our Administration. I have serious concerns, however, about the subsidies that the Act would force taxpayers to pay to lenders on top of the payments made by borrowers. It is critical that we move toward a system that relies on market pressures, not political pressures, in setting subsidies for lend-

ers and intermediaries. My Administration is committed to working with the Congress on a long-term, mutually acceptable solution that moves toward a market-based mechanism for determining lender returns.

Regrettably and unintentionally, H.R. 2400 contains a number of technical errors related to veterans benefits and important highway safety programs. I urge the Congress to complete action on and send me promptly the House-passed technical corrections bill, H.R. 3978, which addresses these concerns.

The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century represents a significant achievement in our efforts to meet our transportation needs in the next century. I commend the Congress for its diligent, bipartisan efforts to resolve differences and to pass this important legislation.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
June 9, 1998.

NOTE: H.R. 2400, approved June 9, was assigned Public Law No. 105–178.

Statement on Proposed Child Care Legislation

June 9, 1998

The balanced budget I submitted to Congress includes an ambitious initiative to make child care better, safer, and more affordable. America’s working families and our Nation’s children deserve our attention and action on this critical issue. Today House Democrats are unveiling an important proposal—sponsored by over 100 Representatives—to address the child care needs of working families. Like my child care initiative, this new package significantly increases child care subsidies for poor children, provides greater tax relief to help low- and middle-income families pay for child care, creates a tax credit for businesses that provide child care to their em-

ployees, increases after-school opportunities for children, promotes early learning, and improves child care quality.

I believe that by continuing to work together and by taking the best proposals from both sides of the aisle, we can achieve legislation that helps Americans fulfill their responsibilities as workers, and even more importantly, their responsibilities as parents. I welcome this important contribution from House Democrats, and I urge all Members of Congress to come together this year to improve child care for our Nation’s working families.